

A "Flying" Snake

By H. M. PENDLEBURY

On Sunday, January 12th, 1930, I was walking along the Bentong road in Pahang, Federated Malay States, at about the fifth mile on the Bentong side of Ginting Sempak.

On the left of the road, the hill descends steeply to a valley, and about one to two chains down the hillside had been cleared though some undergrowth had started to grow up again. The lower part of the valley still holds a number of tall forest trees.

I happened to be looking towards the tops of these trees amongst which some monkeys were moving when my attention became concentrated on an object which floated from near the top of one of the tallest trees into the rank undergrowth down the hillside below me. For a moment I thought that the object was merely a wisp of dried grass, but then I saw that it was clearly a snake about two feet six inches in length on which the sun was shining. From what I saw of it, its colour was blackish above and greyish beneath; the head and neck were reddish-yellow. Its body was held in a double "S" position, flattened beneath, and during descent it lashed its tail vigorously to the right several times as though trying to steer itself to some particular spot. These tail lashings became more pronounced immediately before it landed when it dropped the tail end of its body and alighted, under complete control, on some large-leaved plant and disappeared into the undergrowth. The angle of descent was roughly 45 degrees, and the distance it travelled would be, I should say, about 100 feet in roughly seven seconds.

I can find no record of a similar observation in this country, but the late Mr. R. Shelford recorded (Proc. Zool. Soc. 1906, p. 227) three species of snakes: *Ahaetulla picta* Gmel. (= *Dendrophis pictus*), *Chrysopetea ornata* Shaw, and *Ch. feleas* And. (= *chrysochlora* Reinw.) which had been observed to "fly" in Borneo. But in every case the body of the snakes was held straight during the fall, the ventral surface being "hollowed so that it fell, not in a direct line to the ground, but at an angle, the body being kept rigid the whole time". In my observation the body of the snake was not kept rigid, and the lashing of the tail was one of the prominent features; the fall appeared to be under control throughout.